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**The Report Committee for Bianca Joanyve Jones
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**University Type as a Moderator between Cultural Mistrust, University
Comfort, and Help-Seeking Attitudes among African American College
Students**

**APPROVED BY
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

Supervisor:

Kevin Cokley

Richard Valencia

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Bianca Joanyve Jones, B.A.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this report to my family and friends for their unwavering encouragement and love.

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I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Kevin Cokley, for his support and guidance.

Abstract

University Type as a Moderator Between Cultural Mistrust, University Comfort, and Help-Seeking Attitudes among African American College Students

Bianca Joanvye Jones, M.A.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2011

Supervisor: Kevin Cokley

This proposed study will explore how university racial composition impacts the relationship between cultural mistrust, campus comfort, and help-seeking attitudes in a sample of African American college students. A moderated hierarchical regression will be conducted to determine if the cultural and contextual variables predict a significant amount of variance in help-seeking attitudes, and to discover if the variables' interaction with university type significantly increased the amount of explained variance. The results will demonstrate how one's comfort in the university environment and degree of trust in the majority group can contribute to seeking psychological services. Counseling and university policy implications will be delineated from the results. Limitations will also be discussed.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	1
INTEGRATIVE ANALYSIS.....	5
Mental Health Service Utilization	5
Counseling Center Utilization by African American Students.....	9
Help-Seeking Attitudes.....	11
Cultural Mistrust.....	18
Institutional Characteristics of HBCUs and PWIs.....	21
University Comfort: Perceptions of University Environment and Cultural Congruity	23
PROPOSED RESEARCH STUDY.....	28
Statement of Problem.....	28
Statement of Purpose	29
Research Questions and Hypotheses	29
METHOD	36
Analysis and Expected Results	41
DISCUSSION.....	44
Summary	44
Limitations and Future Research Directions.....	47
REFERENCES.....	49

INTRODUCTION

African Americans have similar prevalence rates of mental disorders as European Americans; however, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2001) report that African Americans are overall less likely to utilize mental health services. Mental health utilization disparities exist even when accounting for differences in income, education, and marital status. Also, when controlling for differences in socioeconomic status and need, the percentage of African Americans receiving necessary treatment is only half the percentage of European Americans. When African Americans do receive treatment for mental health issues, they usually seek help from primary care physicians as opposed to licensed mental health professionals trained to treat psychological disorders (DDHS, 2001).

Further, research indicates African Americans are overrepresented in inpatient settings, suggesting delayed treatment results in severe psychological symptomatology that requires extensive treatment (Cheung & Snowden, 1990). Perhaps most importantly, African Americans with severe mental health disorders are more susceptible to homelessness and incarceration. For example, a study conducted in Missouri found that African American children with mental health disorders are more likely to be sent to juvenile detention centers when compared to their European American counterparts, who are more likely to be sent to residential treatment centers (Janku & Yan, 2009). Thus, it is imperative to better understand help-seeking attitudes in the African American

community, so that mental health providers can market and provide services in a way that is desirable to persons of African descent.

Studies examining counseling utilization and help-seeking attitudes in the African American community are frequently conducted with African American college students at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) (Barksdale & Molock, 2008). Neighbors (1991) reveals that African Americans between the ages of 18 to 24 – the traditional college student age range – are less likely to use professional psychological help than older African American adults. Also, African American college students are likely to seek help from close friends or relatives, instructors, and academic advisors (Tinsley, de St. Aubin, & Brown, 1982). While variables such as financial barriers, alternate treatment modalities, and limited access to services have been cited as deterrents to mental health service utilization, culturally relevant factors seem to have a much stronger impact (DHHS, 2001). The influence of such culture specific variables is especially visible in the African American college population. Specifically, students typically have convenient access to mental health services via the university counseling center which offers counseling for little-to-no cost; however, research continues to demonstrate low rates of utilizations in African American students (Davidson, Yakushka, & Sanford-Martens, 2004). It is important to continue investigating cultural variables that influence help seeking attitudes in African American college students.

Cultural mistrust, the extent to which blacks mistrust whites, is one cultural variable often used to explicate disinclination in seeking help, and African American behavior in general (Whaley, 2001). Terrell and Terrell (1981) builds upon Grier and

Cobb's (1968) theory of a "healthy paranoia of whites" to argue African Americans' long history of oppression by European Americans has caused them to develop a healthy mistrust of whites. Nickerson, Helms, and Terrell (1994) applied this concept to the white-dominated mental health field and found that African American college students with high levels of cultural mistrust have more negative attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help. Cultural mistrust has also been shown to play a role in other therapeutic treatment factors such as counselor race preference, termination rates, and expectations of counseling (Terrell & Terrell, 1984; Watkins, Terrell, Miller, & Terrell, 1989). While this is an essential variable to consider, it does not solely explicate help-seeking attitudes in African American college students.

Contextual variables are also crucial factors in understanding help-seeking attitudes. Research demonstrates that African American students at PWIs report less favorable campus climates than other ethnic minority students (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000), as well as African American students at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) (Constantine & Watt, 2002). This is primarily due to the race related stressors African American students encounter at PWIs (Pfeifer & Schneider, 1974; Greer & Chwalisz, 2007). Students' perceptions of their university environment and fit within the university have been found to predict help-seeking attitudes; however, such research is sparse and inconsistent. It is important that this relationship is expanded, as an understanding of the experiences of students in different university settings is vital when providing appropriate mental health services.

The present study will extend the literature on cultural mistrust, university comfort, and help-seeking attitudes among African American students. This will be done by comparing the relationships between the cultural and contextual variables in different university settings. In addition, school will be examined as a moderator between cultural mistrust, university comfort, and help seeking-attitudes.

INTEGRATIVE ANALYSIS

Mental Health Service Utilization

The literature that compares rates of psychological disorders in the African American and European American populations is somewhat inconsistent. For example, research proposes that African Americans are at a greater risk for mental health disorders due to an increased likelihood of living in poverty (Snowden, 1999). Another study posits African Americans have higher rates of depression when compared to European Americans (Ostrove, Feldman, & Adler, 1999). It is also documented that African Americans are more likely to be diagnosed with schizophrenia and phobic disorders than European Americans (Jones & Gray, 1986; Hybels, Blazer, & Kaplan, 2000).

Conversely, other scholars suggest the disparities are minimal or nonexistent. The Epidemiologic Catchment Area study showed that the differences in the prevalence of depression disappears once socioeconomic status, age, gender, and marital status were taken into account (Zhang & Snowden, 1999). In addition, the National Comorbidity Survey (NCS) determined that African Americans are less likely to be depressed than European Americans, even when allowing for socioeconomic status and other demographic differences. The authors also found that African Americans continued to have lower lifetime prevalence rates of depression (Kessler et al., 1996).

Despite these inconsistencies, the Surgeon General's Mental Health Report issued by The U.S. Department of Health and Human services in 2001 reached the conclusion that:

African Americans living in the community appear to have overall rates of distress symptoms and mental illness similar to those of whites, although some exceptions may exist... Furthermore, the distribution of disorders may be different between groups, with African Americans having higher rates of some disorders and lower rates of others. (p. 67)

Most researchers tend to agree with this consensus. This shows that African Americans are indeed experiencing mental health disorders that warrant professional psychological services.

While a handful of studies (e.g., Diala, Muntaner, Walrath, Nickerson, LeVeist, & Leaf, 2000) have found that African Americans are more likely to utilize mental health services than European Americans, most research shows that African Americans are less likely to use professional psychological services (Cheung & Snowden, 1990; Robins & Reiger, 1991). Inconsistencies are typically attributed to differences in sampling procedures and methodologies. Differences are apparent in the type of mental health facilities used by African American and European American clients. Specifically, African Americans are more likely to make use of primary care physicians and emergency room settings, whereas European Americans are more likely to seek private care (DHHS, 2001). This is mainly attributed to discrepancies in financial resources and private health insurance. In fact, as of 2001, 20.2% of African Americans were uninsured (NAMI Fact Sheet, 2004). Examination of demographic variables within the African American community, such as gender and socioeconomic status, reveals differences in help-seeking. African American males are less likely to utilize professional psychological

services than African American females (Neighbors, 1991). Also, African Americans with a lower socioeconomic status are more likely to use mental health services, typically because of their access to discounted medical care (Snowden & Thomas, 2000).

The consequences of not seeking mental health services may be considerably more negative for African Americans than for European Americans. For example, one study conducted to examine the rates of mental illness in the homeless and incarcerated population in San Francisco found that 18% of inmates were identified as having mental disorders (McNeil, Binder, & Robinson, 2005). The researchers also found approximately 16% of inmates were homeless prior to arrest and that the mental illness rates in this subgroup were elevated. Further, this segment was more likely to be charged with felonies. This represents a serious issue in the black community as African Americans are grossly overrepresented in both the homeless and incarcerated population. African Americans represent 40% of the homeless population and almost half of all prisoners (NAMI Fact Sheet, 2004). African American children are overrepresented in the foster care system and are consequently more likely to develop mental illnesses. Unfortunately, 73% to 79% of children in the child welfare system do not receive care (Stagman & Cooper, 2010). In addition, suicide rates have increased approximately 233% in African Americans aged 10 to 14 (NAMI fact sheet, 2004).

These figures suggest that some African Americans are in need of psychological services, but may be unable to acquire services because of contextual barriers and cultural beliefs. African Americans are generally relying on alternate resources to deal with psychological difficulties, yet issues such as suicidality and depression need the attention

of licensed mental health professionals. Because African Americans are overrepresented in the “at-risk” population, it is vital that they become comfortable utilizing the wide array of resources that are available, including professional mental health treatment.

The review thus far has focused on the African American population as a whole; however, African Americans are by no means a homogenous group. It is important to focus on subgroups of the community to determine what, if any, factors differentiate mental health utilization patterns within the group. With the increase in mental illness in the college population at large (Benton et al., 2003), it is particularly pertinent to investigate the help-seeking attitudes of African American college students. This is especially important as African American college students represent the subgroup least likely to use mental health services (Neighbors, 1991). College students of all races and ethnicities must deal with the psychosocial and academic challenges of higher education; however, African American students, especially those at PWIs, must also cope with the tribulations associated with being a minority in an oppressive and isolating environment (Ancis, Sedlack, & Mohr, 2000; Fleming, 1984; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). African American students report race related incidents as a source of stress (Neville, Heppner, Ji, & Thye, 2004), and this stress may hinder academic performance in some students. It is documented that African American college students are likely to seek out informal help (e.g., help from clergy, family, or friends) with mental health issues (Constantine, Wilton, & Caldwell, 2003; Chaing, Hunter, & Yeh, 2004). Nonetheless, this does not mean informal care is sufficient to combat moderate to severe psychological

distress. As such, researchers must continue to investigate the mechanisms that make African American college students disinclined to seek help.

Counseling Center Utilization by African American Students

Similar to mental health utilization rates in the African American community at large, inconsistencies are also present in the literature about African American college students' help-seeking patterns. Boesch and Cimbolich (1994) found that African American students are not utilizing the counseling centers any less than non-African American students. In fact, African American students significantly outnumbered the percentage of non-African American students who presented for counseling. The researchers did not establish a significant difference between the amount of African American students seeking counseling services at HBCUs and PWIs. Interestingly, Boesch and Cimbolich (1994) also found that at PWIs, African American students were more likely to visit the counseling center if at least one counselor was black. The authors did not include the HBCU in this analysis because they assumed there would be little variation in the race of the counselors (many of them were African American).

There are noticeable distinctions in how African Americans use counseling centers. For example, Kearny, Drapper, and Baron (2005) indicate that African American students averaged significantly fewer sessions than European American students. The authors suggest this could be a result of the brief, solution-focused approach many African Americans prefer or because of a lack of ethnically similar clinicians. Also, some research suggests African Americans are more likely to seek help

for non-personal issues, such as academic concerns, than European Americans. Specifically, African American students were three times more likely to seek out an academic counselor than European American students (Cheatham, Shelton, & Ray, 1987). However, this may be dependent on the school type. African American students at HBCUs are more likely to present with emotional/social problems than African American students at PWIs (Boesch & Cimbolich, 1994). It is important to note, however, that this may also be a function of the specialized services offered by the school, as many schools have separate entities for career and academic counseling (Tomlinson & Cope, 1988). Also, when the school increases in size (more than 2,700) these differences disappear (Boesch & Cimbolich, 1994).

Research indicating that African Americans are seeking out counseling centers is encouraging. In particular, scholars have highlighted the effectiveness of a specialized counseling program targeted at increasing retention rates among African American students. Trippi and Cheatham (1989) surveyed 1,620 African American freshmen at a PWI and found that increased in-person communication between the student and counselor was positively related to persistence in college. The researchers also found in a later study that students who sought counseling for legal concerns graduated in higher numbers (Trippi & Cheatham, 1991). These results were particular to younger students, signifying the need for counseling center to reach out to incoming freshmen. Although the students may have sought help for non-personal issues, the interaction with the counselor contributed to positive student outcomes.

African American students at PWIs are frequently studied (Barksdale & Molock, 2009). Some scholars argue that the hostile environment African American students must contend with at PWIs can be psychologically distressing (Fleming, 1984; Neville et al., 2004). Constantine, Wilton, and Caldwell (2003), propose that African American students at PWIs with high levels of distress are more likely to obtain mental health services compared to students with lower levels of distress. Additionally, the authors found that students with greater social support were less likely to seek counseling, and satisfaction with social support mitigated the negative influence of psychological distress.

The aforementioned studies are of great interest because they indicate that the campus environment has a powerful influence on African Americans' attitudes towards college counseling centers. It is essential to examine the many contextual and cultural factors that predict help-seeking attitudes so that behavioral health providers can present services in a manner that is appealing to African American students. This is particularly important due to the previously mentioned increasing percentage of students with mental health concerns.

Help-Seeking Attitudes

Help-seeking attitudes can be described as the perceptions people harbor about seeking mental health services. The research around this concept began with Reznikoef, Brady, and Zeller's (1955) and Nunally's (1961) investigations of the general populations' conceptions of mental illness, specifically in psychiatric patients. These earlier works suggest that mental illness is highly stigmatized and that attitudes about mental health vary by demographic characteristics, such as age, educational level, and

sex. The study of help-seeking attitudes in non-psychiatric patients began to gain momentum with Fischer and Turner's (1970) development of a measure designed to capture help-seeking attitudes.

Overall, the research on help-seeking attitudes in all sectors of the mental health care field indicate that females that are highly educated and well off are more likely to endorse positive attitudes towards seeking help (Fischer & Turner, 1970; Mackenzie, Gekoski, & Knox, 2006; Wierzbicki & Pekarik, 1993). When examining college students of color, research reveals African American males have less favorable attitudes towards counseling than African American females (Chaing, Hunter, & Yeh, 2004; Wallace & Constantine, 2005) and tend to wait until their symptoms are more severe before seeking mental health services (Tomlinson & Cope, 1988). Moreover, Bonner (1997) showed that African American males at PWIs believed the university counseling centers were directed by white men who would not be able to understand their struggles.

One of the earliest works to examine African American college students' help-seeking attitudes is Johnson's (1977) investigation of perceptions of counselors at a HBCU. Johnson (1977) sought to examine the wide spread notion throughout the 60's and 70's that African Americans were generally skeptical of counselors. His data revealed that African American students at HBCUs did not harbor strong negativism towards counseling. Johnson stated that his findings should challenge the idea that African American students are inherently distrustful of counseling.

In concluding that school racial composition did not impact perceptions of counseling, Johnson failed to consider the possible impact the predominantly African

American college, and consequently largely black counseling center staff, could have had an influence on the responses of his participants. The counseling center of the university from which Johnson (1977) gathered his data consisted of nine counselors. Of those nine counselors, eight were African American. In comparison to the percentage of African American counselors at PWIs, this proportion is high. So it seems possible that the high chance of seeing an African American counselor may have buffered negative perceptions of counselors.

Duncan's (2003) study on African American male college students' help-seeking attitudes also provides support for the idea of school racial composition impacting attitudes towards seeking help. Duncan examined how age, socioeconomic status, cultural mistrust, and African self consciousness – characterized by positive black identity as well as knowledge, and practice of African inspired philosophies and culture – influenced attitudes towards seeking professional mental health help. Results showed that African American men who were older and reported a low socioeconomic status had more positive attitudes towards seeking help. Additionally, higher levels of cultural mistrust were associated with attitudes towards seeking help, but African self consciousness was not.

What is most interesting about this study is that the African American male college students did not report negative attitudes towards seeking help. The average score of help-seeking attitudes was 77.90 on a 0 – 87 scale (Duncan, 2003; Fischer & Turner, 1970). This seems to contradict the assumption that African Americans, especially African American males, are averse to seeking mental health services.

However, Duncan's methodology shows his sample consisted predominantly (81%) of African American males from HBCUs. Duncan states a limitation of the study is that it may not be generalizable to African American males at PWIs. He goes on to explain that the predominantly African American college provides more opportunities for males to interact with ethnically similar faculty and counselors. This further suggests that the racial composition of universities may influence help-seeking attitudes.

An 11 year analysis observed the use of counseling services by African American college students (June, Curry, & Gear, 1990). The authors found that in their sample, which consisted of students from a PWI, students would prefer to receive help at the counseling center, over other counseling entities on campus. What makes this university unique, however, is the various ethnicities represented in the counselor center staff (June, Curry & Gear, 1990). The diverse staff is unique from the traditional counseling center and could possibly impact the conceptions African Americans students have about using their services.

Thompson and Cimboric's (1978) research seems to demystify the theme of school racial composition impacting help-seeking attitude. The researchers completed the first examination of African American students' use of university counseling centers at PWIs (Thompson & Cimboric, 1978). The researchers approached the study with the premise that if African Americans had a choice to work with an African American counselor, they would be more inclined to use such services. Their investigation confirmed this hypothesis. They established a relationship between counseling center use and counselor race, whereby students were more likely to use the counseling center if an

African American counselor was available. Additionally, Thompson and Cimbalic (1978) found that if African American students at PWIs had an opportunity to choose between an African American and European American counselor, they would choose the former.

Counselor race preference is not the only factor that influences help-seeking attitudes, yet it is certainly one of the most documented. A meta-analytic review of the counselor race preference reveals that overall, ethnic minorities tend to have a preference for ethnic minority counselors when forced to choose between an ethnic minority or white counselor (Coleman, Walmpold, & Casali, 1995). Further, they found that cultural affiliations, such as racial identity, tend to moderate this preference. For example, Parham and Helms (1981) determined certain racial identity stages, as defined by the Racial Identity Attitude Scale, shaped African Americans acceptance of African American and European American counselors. More specifically, individuals with preencounter attitudes tended to prefer non African American counselors and those in the immersion/emersion phase preferred African American counselors. Their results suggest that as African Americans become more comfortable with their racial identity, racial characteristics of the counselor become less important than other features such as skill level.

Coleman, Wampold, and Casali (1995) state a limitation of the counselor race preference literature is that in many of the studies, participants were forced to choose between a white and non-white counselor. Therefore, participants did not have the opportunity to select a no preference option. The researchers argue, as the no preference

option was restricted, the selection of a non-white counselor increased. This seems to be a valid weak point in this body of work as it does not realistically represent the process of selecting counselors. However, it is important to keep in mind that African American college students, particularly those at PWIs, rarely have the opportunity to choose an African American counselor. The Department of Health and Human Services report only two percent of psychologists in the United States are African American (2001). Social workers have the largest percentage of African American clinicians, but the percentage is still minimal at 4 percent (DHHS, n.d.). Therefore, if forced selection of counselors influences counselor preference, the question of how having no choice influences perception must be asked.

Cultural variables related to help-seeking have been documented both quantitatively and qualitatively; however, information gathered from focus groups seems to be particularly revealing. Thompson, Brazile, and Akbar (2004) conducted mixed-sex focus group to deconstruct African Americans perceptions of psychotherapy and psychotherapist. The use of focus groups allowed African Americans to candidly express their views. The study shows that many African Americans report similar cultural barriers to seeking mental health services. For instance, both men and women expressed concerns about appearing weak. Participants stated that they expected life to be difficult and that African Americans should be able to deal with the inevitable hardships. Concern was also expressed about disclosing private information about themselves, as well as family and friends. In addition, the participants identified stigma, mistrust, cultural insensitivity, financial barriers, alternate resources (e.g., church), and lack of knowledge

as additional barriers to seeking psychotherapy. Thompson, Brazile, and Akbar (2004) found that even educated participants were generally misinformed about therapy. Participants stated that it was difficult to ascertain whether a situation had reached a point to seek psychological help. Quantitative research supports the participants' statements and also adds additional variables to the conversation, such as ethnic identity (Delphin & Rollock, 1995) and psychological misdiagnosis (Jones & Gray, 1986).

The experience of counseling may also bring about more negative view points about help-seeking. Diala and colleagues (2003) found that African Americans in the community held positive views about help-seeking prior to receiving mental health services, but after receipt of services, their attitudes were more negative. Similar results were also found in Thompson, Brazile, and Akbar's (2004) study that revealed participants who received psychotherapy were troubled by their therapists' inability to adequately explain goals and benefits of therapy. Participants in this qualitative study also expressed a strong concern about the therapists' ability to understand their problems. One participant stated, "I would say there are more White psychotherapists out there than Blacks. You know if you made an appointment to see a therapist, more likely than not you are going to be sitting down talking to someone who can't relate to you" (Thompson, Brazile, & Akbar, 2004, p. 23). This statement succinctly represents the concerns many African Americans have towards the mental health profession. Overall, African Americans tend to hold the general belief that professional psychological services are not in alignment with their culture.

Cultural Mistrust

Cultural mistrust is defined by Terrell and Terrell (1981) as the degree to which African Americans mistrust European Americans. They suggest that mistrust is typically generated by the pervasive mistreatment and racism African Americans experience in society. Terrell and Terrell (1981) expanded upon the ideas Grier and Cobbs (1968), two Harvard psychiatrists, introduced in their book *Black Rage*. This seminal work was among the first to introduce the idea that African Americans must always be vigilant around European Americans in order to ensure their well being. They go on to explain that not having a cultural paranoia of whites will cause African Americans to “live a life of such pain and shock as to find life itself unbearable (Grier & Cobbs, 1968).”

Some scholars have debated whether or not using the term “paranoia” implies psychopathology. This is a concern as historically, African American behavior has been pathologized by Eurocentric psychologists, particularly in the realm of paranoia symptomatology (Whaley, 1997). For instance, African American clients are apt to be misdiagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia due to incompetent clinicians misinterpreting a healthy cultural paranoia (Ridley, 1984; Whaley, 1997). Generally, most researchers tend to adopt the term cultural mistrust as this appropriately includes an emphasis on the individuals’ unique experiences and does not indicate mental illness (Terrell, Taylor, Menzise, & Barrett, 2000). Because African Americans are such a heterogeneous group, it is important to note that cultural mistrust does not impact all African Americans equally.

Whaley's (2001) meta-analytic review of cultural mistrust reveals the construct has been linked to behaviors in many domains such as academic achievement, singing styles, career aspirations, and AIDS knowledge; however, cultural mistrust has been most frequently studied within the context of the mental health field. Researchers propose that African Americans may be disinclined to obtain mental health services because they mistrust the mental health system and especially, the European American clinician (Grier & Cobbs, 1968; Terrell & Terrell, 1981; Whaley, 2001). Studies show that African Americans that report higher levels of cultural mistrust are more likely to terminate psychotherapy prematurely (Terrell & Terrell, 1984) and limit self disclosure (Poston, Craine, & Atkinson, 1991) when being seen by a European American therapist.

Research suggests that cultural mistrust is related to perceptions of counselor credibility and effectiveness in African American college students at HBCUs (Watkins, Terrell, Miller & Terrell, 1989). Watkins and colleagues (1989) found that students who score high in mistrust view counselors as less favorable if they were European American and tend to view those counselors as less effective in helping them work through psychosocial issues. Similar results are reported in Watkins and Terrell's (1988) earlier analogue study that examined mistrust levels and the black-white client-counselor dyad. Watkins and Terrell (1988) also indicate that African Americans who are highly mistrustful expect less from counseling than less mistrustful African Americans and this association persists despite the counselor identifying as African American. This suggests cultural mistrust does not solely measure African Americans' mistrust of European

Americans, but also their general level of mistrust. Moreover, this finding demonstrates how cultural mistrust can impact perceptions about counseling in general.

Nickerson, Helms, and Terrell (1994) recognized the need to assess the relationship between cultural mistrust and help-seeking attitudes in African Americans students at a PWI. Their findings indicate that when the counseling staff is primarily European American, those with higher levels of mistrust of whites report more negative attitudes towards seeking help as well as lower expectations from counseling. More recent research has also demonstrated the association between cultural mistrust and help-seeking attitudes. Duncan and Johnson (2007) found that cultural mistrust, along with demographic variables, predicted help-seeking attitudes. In particular, being female, reporting lower levels of mistrust, and low socioeconomic status predicted more positive attitudes towards seeking help. The investigators state the generalizability of their study is limited as their sample consisted of African American students at a HBCU. This provides further evidence for the need to compare African American students at both university settings.

Once college students make the decision to seek out mental health services from university counseling centers, cultural mistrust may affect the quality of their counseling experience. Thompson, Worthington, and Atkinson (1994) established a link between cultural mistrust and self disclosure in African American women at PWIs. This research demonstrates that higher levels of cultural mistrust results in less self disclosure when the counselor is European American. Conversely, participants low in cultural mistrust demonstrated the most self-disclosure when paired with an African American counselor.

Thompson et al. (1994) speculate that women with high levels of cultural mistrust also chose to reduce their level of self-disclosure with African American counselors because of a general mistrust of all counselors in a PWI. It is possible the participants view the African American counselors as an extension of European American society.

Institutional Characteristics of HBCUs and PWIs

The historic *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* Supreme Court decision in 1954 declared racial segregation in public schools illegal and propelled the integration of the United States public school system. Prior to this ruling, African Americans were excluded from institutions of higher learning and as such attended schools specifically created for them - HBCUs (Wright, 1987). In the 1950's, over 90% of African Americans received their education at HBCUs. Integration undoubtedly propelled the African American enrollment rate at those once restricted institutions, and during the 1970's approximately 66 to 75% of African American students were educated at PWIs (Fleming, 1984). As of 2001, approximately 13% ($N=289,985$) of African American students were enrolled at HBCUs (Provasnik, Shafer, & Snyder, 2004). Despite the high enrollment rate of African American students at PWIs, they are not graduating at rates equivalent to those at HBCUs (Allen, 1992).

The obvious characteristic that chiefly distinguishes HBCUs from PWIs is campus racial composition. On average, HBCUs' enrollment consists of approximately 82% African American students (Provasnik, Shafer, & Snyder, 2004), compared to PWIs at 11 % (Hoffman, Llagas, & Snyder, 2003). Additionally, 60% of full time faculty at HBCUs are African American (Provasnik, Shafer, & Snyder, 2004), whereas PWIs

employ approximately 7% to 13% (Bonner, 2001; National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). Approximately 50% of all African American professional staff in institutions of higher education are employed at HBCUs.

Additionally, HBCUs typically enroll considerably less students than PWIs. For example, the largest HBCU, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, enrolls 12,226 students, about one sixth the number of students enrolled at the largest PWI, Arizona State University (70,440 students) (FAMU Office of Institutional Research; Keeler, 2010). Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) propose large institutions may hinder student involvement and degree attainment, particularly for African American students. High student-faculty ratios may inhibit quality student-teacher interactions, and such interactions have been found to predict academic performance (Delaney, 2008) and academic self-concept (Cokley, 2002).

Campus characteristics of HBCUs and PWIs are often examined and compared to uncover what type of environment(s) best facilitates African American students' psychosocial and academic adjustment and development (Cokley, 1999). Allen (1992) compared student outcomes of African American students at HBCUs and PWIs using a data set of over 2,500 students. Results showed African American students at HBCUs reported higher academic achievement than students at PWIs. Also, students at PWIs were less socially involved in school. Notably, campus racial climate significantly correlated with relationships with professors, whereby students at HBCUs reported more favorable connections with professors. Of all the variables included in the model, campus racial composition served as the strongest predictor of student outcomes. This indicates that African Americans are most affected by their social context with regards to

academic performance, social involvement, and occupational goals. Aside from personality characteristics, student development is highly affected by the quality of life at the campus, level of academic competition, university resources, race relations, relationship with faculty and friends, and social support. Allen proposes that HBCUs allow students to feel engaged, connected, accepted, and mentored, and it is this support that promotes development and success.

University Comfort: Perceptions of University Environment and Cultural Congruity

One of the earliest studies that explored perceptions of campus climates in African American students found that African American students at PWIs viewed their environment more negatively than did European American students, particularly because of their experiences with personal and institutional racism (Pfeifer & Schneider, 1974). Since then, African American students' perception of their campus climate has received a considerable amount of attention, and research continues to document African American students' negative perceptions of their predominantly white university environments (Ancis, Sedlack, & Mohr, 2000; D'Augelli & Herschberger, 1993; Museus, Nichols, & Lambert, 2008; Rankon & Reason, 2005). Gloria and Kurpius (1996) propose that both the students' perception of the university environment and cultural congruity must be examined when understanding how ethnic and racial minorities experience their campus. University environment is defined as one element of students' social support. Cultural congruity is considered the extent to which students of color believe their university is in alignment with their cultural values. Much of the research on university environment has focused on the relation with academic factors, such as academic persistence (Gloria, Kurpius, Hamilton, & Willson, 1999) and degree completion (Museus, Nichols, &

Lambert, 2008), indicating negative perceptions of the university environments predict less favorable academic outcomes. It is important to note, however, that research has also shown that negative university experiences can increase students expectations of earning a degree (Pfiefer, 1976) and negative experiences do not always influence academic efficacy (Edman & Brazil, 2008).

Flemings (1984) suggests African Americans might be attracted to PWIs because of better resources, facilities, and prestige; yet, the adjustment may be difficult for many students. Flemings book, *Blacks in College: A comparative study of students' success in black and in white institutions* (1984), is a comprehensive study that uses a cross sectional research design to track the progress of African American students at HBCUs and PWIs. Her sample consisted of African American and European American freshmen and seniors across 15 universities; however the results featured here will focus on only African American students. According to her work, students at PWIs complain of low African American enrollment rates, few African American faculty and staff, and racial discrimination from the campus community. She goes on to explain that because African American students are essentially caught off guard by the hostility, they develop feelings of anger and consequently withdraw from European Americans. This ultimately leads to a distrust of European Americans. Wright (1987) also supports this assertion stating biases of race, gender, and social class weakens ethnic minority students' ability to trust peers, thus complicating student relationships. It is under this climate that student development is stunted for both ethnic minority and white students.

Admittedly, the aforementioned studies are outdated and were primarily written as a response to the relatively recent integration of the school system. Nonetheless, more recent research also supports the notion that students at PWIs continue to experience racism, but perhaps now in a more covert manner. Solorazano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000)

investigated African Americans' view about their campus's racial climate with the use of focus groups and found that students are experiencing racial microaggressions in academic and social spaces. In short, microaggressions are considered "unconscious and subtle" forms of racism (Solorazano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). One student described her experience like this:

I've had times when a guy in the class ... [said], 'Well, I don't want to work with you because you're Black.' And he told me to my face.... And it was upsetting 'cause ... I came here thinking that it wouldn't be like this, and that was naive. (p. 67).

This statement was one of many statements that echoed experiences of stereotyping and invisibility. The researchers also found that students who experienced microaggression on campus felt frustrated, isolated, discouraged, and exhausted from dealing with reoccurring incidents of racism.

Of great interest in this article is the students' use of counter spaces to buffer the effects of microaggressions. These counter spaces were essentially campus entities, such as African American student organizations or campus offices, where they could experience a nurturing university environment. Having a safe space to interact with others is important in that students are able to vent their frustrations about the campus environment and engage in positive and meaningful social interactions. It can be argued that HBCUs are essentially enlarged versions of counter spaces. They offer students solace from the covert and overt racism that is pervasive in society, provides social support, and allows students to view examples of and interact with other highly achieving African Americans.

Greer and Chwalisz (2007) examined coping and stress in African American students at a HBCUs and PWIs and found that students at PWIs endorsed more minority status stress than students at HBCUs. There were no differences in scores for general

stress, implying African American students are experiencing stress due to their race. Also, type of school was one predictor of minority student stress. These findings were consistent with other research that indicated African American students reported more racism, ethnic or racial hostility, less equitable treatment, and more pressure to conform to racial stereotypes at rates higher than their Latino and Asian American counterparts (Ancis, Sedlack, & Mohr, 2000).

Minimal research has focused on the university environment and its influence on help-seeking attitudes in African American college students. This is surprising considering counseling services have been found to enhance academic outcomes in African American college students (Trippi & Cheatham, 1989; 1991). Gloria, Hird, and Navarro (2001) found that racial and ethnic minority students at a PWI (African American, American Indian, Asian American, Hispanic, biracial, and multiracial) reported lower cultural congruity and help-seeking attitudes than white students. Similar findings were apparent by gender, whereby male students reported lower cultural congruity and help-seeking attitudes than female students. Also, cultural congruity and university environment accounted for more of the variance for help-seeking attitudes than for white students, and this was found only in female participants. For females, cultural congruity was the strong predictor of help-seeking attitudes.

While these findings support the idea that cultural congruity predicts help-seeking attitudes, Gloria, Hird, and Navarro (2001) utilized an etic approach in their study, thus minimizing differences between various ethnic groups. Their work provided very little insight into how students may uniquely experience the university as a function of their cultural affiliation. A large percentage of the ethnic minority participants in their study were Asian American (19%) and their study included only 12 African American participants. It is risky to assume these results are generalizable to African American

students, especially those that attend HBCUs. Hence, the university comfort constructs needed to be studied specifically in African American students attending different types of university settings.

Relevant research reveals university alienation predicts help-seeking attitudes in African American students at PWIs (Delphin & Rollock, 1995). Surprisingly, university alienation predicted more favorable attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help; however, this did not increase students' likelihood to actually use services. Students high in university alienation may be able to recognize the benefits of seeking help, yet they may feel too disconnected from the university to actually be proactive in finding services. It is also possible that students highly alienated from the university may also harbor feelings of mistrust towards the mainstream population, thus resulting in low service use. No research to date has tested the association between university comfort and cultural mistrust.

The common thread in the work that examines differences in HBCUs and PWIs is the idea that campus racial climate or environment is an important factor to consider when exploring African American college students. The aforementioned studies suggest campus climate can essentially "make or break" the African American college student's academic experience. This is particularly important for university counseling center counselors as they must be willing to explore issues students face that are specific to their environment and experiences as a minority. African American students might be more inclined to utilize university services that can enhance development, such as the counseling center, if they view the services as sensitive and appropriate to their needs. The university counseling center should work towards being a counter space for African American students.

PROPOSED RESEARCH STUDY

Statement of Problem

African Americans tend to be troubled by mental health disorders at the same rate as European Americans, yet they are less likely to seek mental health treatment (DHHS, 2001). Societal disadvantages and institutional oppression make African Americans with mental health issues more susceptible to negative outcomes, such as legal and economic problems. For that reason, it is essential to understand the obstacles blocking African Americans from seeking professional psychological help. Help-seeking attitudes of African Americans have become an important variable to consider, but only a limited number of cultural and contextual factors have been considered when making an effort to understand help-seeking attitudes.

Generally, young adult African Americans between the ages of 18-24 have more negative help-seeking attitudes than older African Americans (Neighbors, 1991). This makes the traditional college age group particularly important to study due to the nationwide rise of mental illnesses in the college student population (Benton et al., 2003). Much of the research on African American students has been within the context of PWIs and has focused on academic outcomes rather than psychological outcomes. Moreover, there is a lack of literature that simultaneously examines and compares cultural and contextual influences on help-seeking attitudes in African American students at HBCUs and PWIs.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study will be to understand how university racial composition impacts the relationship between cultural mistrust, campus comfort, and help-seeking attitudes. The study will first compare help-seeking attitudes, cultural mistrust levels, and campus comfort in African American college students at a HBCU to those at a PWI. Secondly, the study will explore the relationship between all variables. Finally, the study will determine if college or university type serves as a moderator between cultural mistrust, campus comfort, and help-seeking attitudes.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Question 1

Will African American students at HBCUs report more positive help-seeking attitudes than African American students at PWIs?

Hypothesis 1

It is expected that African American students at HBCUs will report more positive help-seeking attitudes than African American students at PWIs.

Rationale

A literature review showed that no research has been completed that compares help-seeking attitudes in African American students at HBCUs and PWIs. However, similar research reveals that African American students at HBCUs do not have a more persistently negative view about counseling in general, but instead, negative views about the European American counselor (Johnson, 1977). Similar results were also reported in a

study utilizing data from the National Comorbidity Survey (Diala, et al., 2000).

Additional work consistently establishes a relationship between counselor race preference and help-seeking attitudes, suggesting that African American college students generally prefer racially similar counselors (Thompson & Cimbolic, 1978; Townes, Chavez-Korrell, & Cunningham, 2009). It seems reasonable that the large African American staff composition at HBCUs may cause students to expect to be seen by an African American counselor. Consequently, help-seeking attitudes are expected to be more positive at this particular college environment.

Research Question 2

Will African American students at HBCUs report lower levels of cultural mistrust than African American students at PWIs?

Hypothesis 2

It is expected that African American students at HBCUs will report lower levels of cultural mistrust than African American students at PWIs.

Rationale

Currently, there is no research that compares cultural mistrust levels in students at HBCUs to those at PWIs. Comparable research reveals African American students at PWIs report higher level of perceived racism than students at HBCUs. Combs et al. (2006) found a positive relationship between perceived racism and cultural mistrust. As such, it is plausible that African American students at PWIs will report higher cultural mistrust as a result of school racial composition.

Research Question 3

Will African American students at HBCUs report higher levels of cultural congruity and more positive perceptions about university environment (campus comfort) than African American students at PWIs?

Hypothesis 3

It is expected that African American students at HBCUs will report higher levels of cultural congruity and more positive perceptions about university environment (campus comfort) than African American students at PWIs.

Rationale 3

Constantine and Watts (2002) found that African American women at HBCUs reported higher cultural congruity than African American women at PWIs. It is expected that the same results will be found in this study. No research was found that compared perceptions of the university environment in African American students at HBCUs and PWIs with Gloria and Kurpius's (1996) university environment scale; however related research reveals students at HBCUs typically perceive their campus as more favorable (Allen, 1992; Fleming, 1984). The same results are expected in this study. Also, the moderate correlation between cultural congruity and university environment perceptions (Gloria & Kurpius, 1996) provides additional support for this hypothesis.

Research Question 4

Will cultural mistrust be related to help-seeking attitudes?

Hypothesis 4

It is expected that cultural mistrust will be related to help-seeking attitudes.

Rationale 4

Previous research has established a relationship between cultural mistrust and help-seeking attitudes whereby higher levels of cultural mistrust were associated with more negative help-seeking attitudes, especially when the counselor is European American (Nickerson, Helms, & Terrell, 1994). It is expected that the results of this study will be in alignment with previous research.

Research Question 5

Will cultural congruity be related to help-seeking attitudes?

Hypothesis 5

It is expected that cultural congruity will be related to help-seeking attitudes.

Rationale 5

Gloria, Hird, and Navarro (2001) found that cultural congruity was related to help-seeking attitudes in a sample of racial and ethnic minority college students. Although their sample included a small percentage of African American students, the same results are expected in this study.

Research Question 6

Will university environment perceptions be related to help-seeking attitudes?

Hypothesis 6

It is expected that university environment perceptions will be related to help-seeking attitudes.

Rationale 6

No research was found that utilized Gloria and Kurpius's (1996) University Environment Scale to assess the relationship between perceptions of university environment and help-

seeking attitudes; however, related research by Delphin and Rollock (1995) revealed university alienation was related to help-seeking attitudes. The University Alienation Scale and University Environment Scale are similar and as such, similar results are expected.

Research Question 7

Is school type related to help-seeking attitudes?

Hypothesis 7

It is expected that school type will be positively related to help-seeking attitudes, meaning the more racially similar the environment, the more likely students will endorse positive help-seeking attitudes.

Rationale 7

Allen (1992) found that school racial composition was the strongest predictor of social involvement in African American students whereby students' at PWIs were less likely to be socially involved than students at HBCUs. Social involvement can constitute many things, including student-teacher interactions and campus organization participation. In essence, students' propensity to confide in teachers can be thought of as a form of help-seeking. Further, students' use of campus organizations is also similar to seeking help. Because these other entities involve seeking help to some extent, it is possible help-seeking attitudes towards counseling will be more positive.

Research Question 8

Does school serve as a moderator of cultural mistrust, cultural congruity, university environment perceptions, and help-seeking attitudes?

Hypothesis 8

It is expected that school will serve as a moderator between cultural mistrust, cultural congruity, university environment perceptions, and help-seeking attitudes.

Rationale 8

The counselor preference literature creates an argument for schools moderating the relationship between cultural mistrust and help-seeking attitudes. Once again drawing upon Nickerson, Helms, and Terrell's (1994) work on cultural mistrust and help seeking attitudes, it is expected that students who report higher levels of cultural mistrust will also endorse more negative attitudes towards seeking help. Research indicates that this is particularly true when the counselor is European American (Nickerson, Helms & Terrell, 1994). As previously mentioned, HBCUs are primarily staffed by African Americans. It is possible that students may expect to be serviced by an African American mental health provider. Coleman, Wampold, and Casali's (1995) meta-analysis on preference and perceptions of counselors revealed ethnic minorities prefer ethnically similar counselors. So, it is possible that school racial composition will serve as a moderator between cultural mistrust and help-seeking attitudes.

Research indicates that African American students at HBCUs report higher cultural congruity and life satisfaction than African American students at PWIs (Constantine & Watts, 2002). Research also shows that increased cultural congruity is related to more positive help-seeking attitudes (Gloria, Hird, & Navarro, 2001). Taking these findings into consideration, it seems possible that the relationship between cultural congruity and help-seeking attitudes will change based on the context of the university.

Delphin and Rollock (1995) found that African American students who endorsed higher levels of university alienation had more positive attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help. The university alienation construct is very similar to university environment, and because African American students perceive HBCUs and PWIs differently, it seems likely that help-seeking attitudes will change based on the school type.

METHOD

Participants

Participants will consist of African American college students from a historically black college or university and a predominantly white institution. Participants from PWIs will be recruited from various campus organizations with large numbers of African American members and from classes with large African American enrollment. Recruitment of participants at the HBCU will also target campus organizations and classes, as well as popular congregating places on campus (e.g., student lounge). A G*Power A priori power analysis was conducted to determine the smallest sample size needed to detect a medium effect size that is significant at the .05 level. Results indicate approximately 245 participants are needed to produce a minimum power of .80 for all analyses.

Instrumentation

Demographic Questionnaire: Demographic items to be included in this study are race, gender, age, year in school (classification), and socioeconomic status. Participants will also be asked the following yes or no response questions: “Have you ever received counseling from a mental health professional?”, “Have you ever received counseling from your school’s university counseling center?”, and “If needed, would you seek mental health counseling from the university counseling center?” The following

qualitative question will also be included: “What are the racial backgrounds of the university counseling center counselors?”

Attitudes Towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help – Short Form (ATSPHH; Fischer & Farina, 1995): The ATSPPH – Short Form is designed to measure attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help. The inventory consists of 10 items that produce a single score representative of the participants’ help-seeking attitudes; higher scores indicate more positive attitudes. The measure uses a four point Likert scale ranging from disagree to agree. The ATSPPH – Short Form is comprised of four subscales: Recognition of Personal Need for Professional Psychological Help (Need), Tolerance of the Stigma Associated with Psychiatric Help (Stigma), Interpersonal Openness Regarding One’s Problem (Openness), and Confidence in the Mental Health Profession (Confidence) (Fischer & Farina, 1995; Fischer & Turner, 1970). Sample items included are : “ There is something admirable in the attitude of a person who is willing to cope with his or her conflicts and fears without resorting to professional help (item 4)” and “ I might want to have psychological counseling in the future (item 6).” The scores on the short form scale correlated. 87 with scales on the original 29 item measure and demonstrated a .80 four week test-retest reliability (Fischer & Farina, 1995). Additionally, The ATSPPH – Short Form has a .84 internal consistency. Known-groups method with males and females who experienced a serious emotional or personal problem was used to measure construct validity. Thirty seven percent of the females and ten percent of the males had sought professional help. The point biserial correlation

between those who sought help and those who did not was .39 ($p < .0001$) for both men and women, .24 ($p < .03$) for women, and .49 ($p < .0001$) for men (Fisher & Farina, 1995).

Cultural Mistrust Inventory (CMI; Terrell & Terrell, 1981): The CMI measures the levels of mistrust African Americans have towards whites. The inventory is comprised of 48 items clustered into four subscales. The subscales measure mistrust towards Whites in the following domains: education and training, political and legal system, work and business, and interpersonal interactions (Terrell & Terrell, 1981). Examples of items included are: “White teachers teach subjects so that it favors whites (item 2)”, “It is best for blacks to be on guard when among whites (item 21)”, and “Whites will say one thing and do another (item 28).” The items are measured on a 7 point Likert scale that ranges from strongly disagree to agree. High scores indicate elevated levels of cultural mistrust. Whaley (2001) suggests using the entire scale versus subscales. Total score has a Cronbach’s alpha of .89 for college students (Nickerson, Helms, & Terrell, 1994). The CMI has a two week test-retest reliability of .86 (Terrell & Terrell, 1984). Convergent and divergent validity was demonstrated by eliminating items that correlated with items in other subscales and by constructing an inter-scale correlation table. Validity has been further demonstrated by the inventory’s correlation with other constructs, such as intelligence test performance measured by the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale-Revised (Terrell, Terrell, & Taylor, 1981).

Cultural Congruity Scale (CCS; Gloria & Kurpius, 1996): The CCS measures racial and ethnic minority students’ cultural fit in the university setting. The scale consists of 13 items with scores ranging from 13 to 91. Scores are summed across and higher scores

represent greater perceived cultural congruity. Eight items are reversed scored. The measure uses a seven point Likert scale ranging from not at all to a great deal. Sample items include: “As an ethnic minority, I feel as if I belong on this campus (item 12)”, “I try not to show the parts of me that are ethnically based (item 1), and “My family and school values often conflict (item 10)”. The CCS has a coefficient alpha of .89 in the validation sample of Chicano/a college students (Gloria & Kurpius, 1996) and a .80 in African American students (Gloria, Kurpius, Hamilton, & Wilson, 1999). A Cronbach’s alpha of .93 was obtained in a sample of African American, female college students (Constantine & Watts, 2002). Predictive validation was calculated by including the CCS in a regression equation that demonstrated a negative correlation between academic persistence and cultural congruity.

University Environment Scale (UES; Gloria & Kurpius, 1996): The UES measures racial and ethnic minorities’ perceptions of the university environment. The scale is comprised of 14 items, with 5 items reversed scored. Example of items included are: “University staff have been warm and friendly (item 2)”, “The university seems to value minority students (item 9)”, and “Faculty have been available to help me make course choices (item 12)”. The items are measured on a 7-point Likert scale that ranges from not at all to very true. Scores range from 14 to 98 and higher scores reflect more positive perceptions of the university environment. The scale has a Cronbach’s alpha of .82 for African American college students (Gloria, Kurpius, Hamilton, & Wilson, 1999). The UES was validated by calculating the inter-item consistency of students at two different universities. The inter-item consistency for school 1 was .81 and .85 for school 2.

Predictive validation was calculated by including the UES in a regression equation that demonstrated a negative correlation between academic persistence and university environment perceptions.

Procedure

After receiving universities' IRB approvals, recruitment of participants will begin. Potential participants will be given a concise flyer with a brief overview of the study and compensation information (see Appendix). The flyer will include two dates and times for participants to complete the survey in a centrally located room reserved by the researcher on their respective campuses. Monday and Wednesday from 3 PM to 9 PM will be reserved for data collection at the HBCU. Tuesday and Thursday from 3 PM to 9 PM will be reserved for data collection at the PWI. Participants will be allowed to enter the room anytime during the allotted time frame to complete the survey packet. Each packet will contain an Informed Consent Form, Demographic Questionnaire, Cultural Mistrust Inventory (CMI), Cultural Congruity Scale (CCS), University Environment Scale (UES), and Attitudes Towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help – Short Form (ATSPPH – Short Form). It will likely take 30 – 45 minutes to complete the survey packets.

Upon completion, participants will be entered into random drawings for two, one hundred dollar VISA gift cards. Participants will be asked to fill out a slip of paper with their name, phone number, and email address. The drawings will be made on Friday and one gift card will be given to a student at the HBCU and the other gift card will be given to a student at the PWI. Anonymity will be ensured by having participants place signed

consent forms and completed packets into separate bins. Further, participants will be able to opt out of the random gift card drawing if concerns surrounding anonymity are expressed.

Analysis and Expected Results

First, the demographics of the sample will be checked to ensure there was adequate representation across demographic groups. Assumption checks will be performed to check for normality, homogeneity of variance among groups, and independent observations. All analyses will use a .05 significance level.

Hypothesis 1

It is hypothesized that African American students at HBCUs will report more positive help-seeking attitudes than African American students at PWIs. To assess this hypothesis, an independent sample t-test will be used to compare the means of help-seeking attitudes. Results from the t-test should indicate that African American students at the HBCU report more positive scores than those at the PWI.

Hypothesis 2

It is expected that African American students at HBCUs will report lower levels of cultural mistrust than African American students at PWIs. To evaluate this hypothesis, an independent sample t-test will be used to compare the means of cultural mistrust. Results from the t-test should indicate that African American students at the HBCU report lower scores than those at the PWI.

Hypothesis 3

It is expected that African American students at HBCUs will report higher levels of cultural congruity and more positive perceptions about university environment than African American students at PWIs. A multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) will be used to see the difference between school type (categorical variable) on cultural congruity and university environment perceptions (multiple dependent interval variables).

Hypothesis 4

It is expected that cultural mistrust will be related to help-seeking attitudes. To assess this hypothesis, the Pearson's correlation will be calculated.

Hypothesis 5

It is expected that cultural congruity will be related to help-seeking attitudes. To assess this hypothesis, the Pearson's correlation will be calculated.

Hypothesis 6

It is expected that university environment perceptions will be related to help-seeking attitudes. To assess this hypothesis, the Pearson's correlation will be calculated.

Hypothesis 7

It is expected that school type will be related to help-seeking attitudes. To assess this hypothesis, the Point-Biserial correlation will be calculated.

Hypothesis 8

It is expected that school will operate as a moderator between cultural mistrust, cultural congruity, university environment perceptions, and help-seeking attitudes. To investigate this hypothesis, a moderated hierarchical regression will be conducted. The criterion variable will be help-seeking attitudes and the predictor variables will be cultural

mistrust, cultural congruity, university environment, and school type. First, cultural mistrust, cultural congruity, and university environment perceptions must be centered to assist in the interpretation of the interaction (Aiken & West, 1991). In the first step of the regression, sex and previous counseling will be entered to control for their influence, followed by the campus comfort variables (cultural congruity and university environment perceptions). Third, school type will be entered followed by cultural mistrust. Next, three 2-way interaction terms will be created between the continuous variables (cultural mistrust, cultural congruity, university environment) and the dichotomous variable (school type). These interaction terms incorporate the joint effect of cultural mistrust, cultural congruity, university environment and school type on help-seeking attitudes. The three interaction terms will be individually entered in the final three steps. After running the analysis, the output will be examined to determine if there is a significant main effect of cultural mistrust, cultural congruity, or university environment, and if there is a significant interaction. If there is a significant interaction, it will be plotted and probed through simple slope analyses (Aiken & West, 1991).

DISCUSSION

Summary

With the increasing rates of mental illness in the college population, examining help-seeking attitudes becomes increasingly important (Benton et al., 2003). This is particularly true for the African American population as they are often reluctant to seek professional psychological services (Neighbors, 1991). Though research has been done to investigate help-seeking attitudes in African American college students, no research has specifically compared attitudes in students in varying university settings. The environments of HBCUs and PWIs have documented differences (Allen, 1992; Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000), thus an understanding of how cultural barriers to seeking help might differ in these school types is integral. Furthermore, research focused on understanding help-seeking attitudes has rarely included contextual variables, creating an incomplete explanation of how African American students perceive mental health services.

The current study investigated students' help-seeking attitudes and whether cultural mistrust, university comfort, and school type could help to explain help-seeking attitudes. The main hypothesis was that school type would moderate the relationship between the aforementioned cultural and contextual variables and help-seeking attitudes. Results provided support for the hypothesized model. Results also provided support for the secondary hypotheses.

In terms of help-seeking attitudes, African American students viewed seeking help as less favorable if they were enrolled at a PWI. This indicated that for study participants, the racial composition of the school impacted their outlook about professional psychological services. Research suggests help-seeking attitudes of African American college students may be affected by the clients' preferences (Thompson & Cimboric, 1978; Chavez-Korrell, & Cunningham, 2009). With such a small percentage of African American professionals at PWIs, African American college students with a preference for ethnically similar counselors could be discouraged by the low probability of seeing an African American clinician. Also, the students' perceptions of a supportive environment and positive teacher-student interactions at HBCU's could possibly lead students to believe the counseling staff would be equally as supportive and encouraging.

The study also revealed that African American students at the HBCU reported lower levels of cultural mistrust than their counterparts. Students at PWIs have expressed concerns about European American faculty being prejudiced towards them, the lack of African American faculty and staff, and an unwelcoming campus environment (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). All of these factors may contribute to feelings of mistreatment and oppression, which could increase the students' level of cultural mistrust.

With regard to cultural comfort, this study produced results similar to existing research (Allen, 1992; Constantine & Watts, 2002). African American students at HBCUs experienced their campus environment as more comfortable, as measured by their perceptions of their university environment and cultural fit within that environment.

Overall, the above results imply students at PWIs may generalize their unfavorable experiences to the counseling center staff and thus be less motivated to use services. Based on prior negative experiences at the university, they may develop a mistrust of school administrators, which lead them to believe the counselors do not have their best interest in mind.

Finally, analysis revealed all variables independently predicted a minimal to moderate amount of the variance in help-seeking attitudes. Moreover, adding the three 2-way interactions to the regression equation significantly increased the amount of explained variance. Stated differently, the relationship between cultural mistrust, campus comfort perceptions, and help-seeking attitudes is moderated by the type of school students attend. Given the importance of both cultural and contextual interactions with help-seeking attitudes, counseling centers must move beyond a one-dimensional approach to attracting students – hiring racially or ethnically similar clinicians. African American students want to receive services in a university environment that they experience as accepting and fitting with their culture. Scholars suggest many PWIs operate on a Eurocentric framework (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996) and this prohibits the inclusiveness students of color seek. Furthermore, African American students need to be able to develop a reasonable amount of trust in both the professional staff and students that comprise the campus community in order to fully engage in counseling services that are available. University administrators at PWIs must aspire to change the racial climate of the campus by increasing diversity and perhaps most importantly, communicate the message that diversity is appreciated and is a central

value (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen, 1998). HBCUs can serve as models for a supportive academic environment for African American students.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The limitations of this study guide future research possibilities. The sample consisted solely of African American students at southwestern universities. Ideally, data should be collected from students in various geographical locations. Contextual factors must also be considered. First, the two universities examined in this study represent the two extremes of enrollment figures. The HBCU has an approximate enrollment of 800 students, whereas the PWI enrolls approximately 50, 000 students. Secondly, the HBCU is a private, faith-based church and the PWI is a public, tier one university. Many types of universities and colleges should be included in future research. Further, this study should be replicated with other ethnic groups as the number of Hispanic and Asian American serving institutions are increasing.

It would be beneficial to examine the actual behavior or use of the counseling center as this study measured only attitudes. Research shows attitudes toward seeking help do not always predict actual counseling center use (Delphin & Rollock, 1995). Additional cultural variables known to influence African American attitudes such as racial or ethnic identity (Nickerson, Helms, & Terrell, 1994), religiosity and spirituality (Mattis, 2002), and racial socialization (Bentley, Adams, & Stevenson, 2009), should be incorporated in future models. This study built upon the idea that school racial composition would impact the relation of cultural mistrust, cultural congruity, university

environment perceptions, and help-seeking attitudes because of counselor preference and university climate. However, only one of these constructs was measured. Future studies should include measures for counselor preference to ascertain whether this assumption is valid.

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